

Chapter 5

Primary Prevention

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Introduction

The purpose of primary prevention is to prevent disease before it occurs. Primary prevention of childhood lead poisoning focuses on children at risk and on the environment(s) in which they live.

The goals of primary prevention goals are to identify, evaluate, and control lead hazards before children are poisoned. The responsibility to recognize and address lead hazards has to be expanded beyond public health and medical professionals to include a variety of community members such as housing agencies, parents, property owners, child advocacy groups, construction trades, neighborhood organizations, and others.

“In theory, primary prevention has always been the goal of childhood lead poisoning programs. In practice, however, most programs focus exclusively on secondary prevention, dealing with children who have already been poisoned. As programs shift to primary prevention, their efforts must be designed to systematically identify and remediate environmental sources of lead including, most importantly, dwellings containing old lead paint.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1991.

Primary prevention includes activities at the individual and the community level. At the individual level, public health activities focus on providing or assuring services to children and families that reflect the current standards of practice of early detection and effective treatment of lead poisoning. Within the community, the public health focus is on assessing and assuring that the community is aware of and mobilized to address the lead hazards that threaten the children in their community.

Individual Level Primary Prevention Activities

To prevent childhood lead poisoning, parents of young children need to be informed of the dangers of lead, how to identify and control lead hazards, and be provided with the tools needed to protect their children from lead exposure.

Health care providers, both public and private, must assure that parents are provided with this information when it is needed, before their child is lead poisoned. Lead poisoning prevention and awareness should be incorporated into prevention practice standards for pregnant women and young children. Providing lead poisoning prevention information into settings where pregnant women and families with young children are seen is important. Lead information should be included in settings such as:

- ✓ Well-child or HealthCheck Visits
- ✓ Pre-school screening visits
- ✓ Head Start
- ✓ Pre-natal home or office visits
- ✓ Post-partum home or office visits
- ✓ Immunization Clinics
- ✓ WIC
- ✓ Health Fairs
- ✓ Mailings to families of newborns and young children

Public health agency nursing, WIC, and environmental staff should all be trained to identify potential lead hazards whenever they are inside a client's home. Housing, weatherization, physicians, and clinic staff in the community should be made aware of the dangers of lead poisoning and the messages they can convey to protect children. Simple messages about lead exposure and how to have your child tested if at risk should be given through multiple settings and media. This prevention message should join other messages, such as the use of door safety latches, infant car seats, and placing infants to sleep on their backs, as basic child safety actions that parents should take.

Community Level Primary Prevention Activities

Neighborhood or community based primary prevention of childhood lead poisoning requires partnerships between local health departments, residents, property owners, community-based organizations, community leaders, and businesses. The main activities should involve identifying, assessing, reducing, and monitoring lead hazards in a community or target neighborhood. The activities may focus on buildings where children younger than 6 years old reside, but interventions should be initiated *before* a child has an elevated blood lead level (BLL). Successful community-based primary prevention initiatives will prevent lead poisoning and keep all children in a neighborhood from being lead poisoned. Some or all of the following steps may be included in a community-based primary prevention initiative:

- ✓ Reduce lead dust hazards and the risk of lead exposure
- ✓ Educate residents, health care providers, property owners, contractors, and community members about childhood lead poisoning
- ✓ Train residents, parents, and property owners to recognize and control lead dust hazards
- ✓ Engage local businesses in providing lead hazard reduction information to the community (such as putting CLP information on stuffers in payroll checks or grocery bags)
- ✓ Train local hardware and paint stores to provide advice on working with lead painted surfaces in remodeling and renovating (see end of chapter for further materials)

The CDC, HUD, and the EPA have supported primary prevention activities in Wisconsin, with the purpose of modifying Wisconsin's housing stock, much of which contains lead-based paint. Communities have been encouraged to map high risk areas by age and condition of housing stock, number of lead poisoned children, and number of children under six years of age.

Mobilization of community efforts for primary prevention takes time, energy, and resources. At the same time, screening, early detection, and treatment of lead poisoned children must be ongoing. Identifying collaborators to expand the capacity to provide education is key to community level primary prevention. Articulating common interests in reducing lead hazard reduction, and defining strategies that will

work for a particular community are all necessary steps in enhancing efforts to eliminate childhood lead poisoning.

References

CDC, *Preventing Lead Poisoning in Young Children, A Statement by the Centers for Disease Control*. October 1991.

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